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SUBJECT: USAID/DCHA FIELD TRIP AND ASSESSMENT, AFAR REGION, ETHIOPIA

¶1. SUMMARY. Drought in Ethiopia's Afar region has taken its toll on pastoralists in woredas most affected by the failure of recent rains, including Chifra, Uwa and Awra. While access to water is a concern, the lack of browse, pasture, and fodder for livestock has had a devastating impact on cattle and sheep, although goats and camels are faring better. Early migration to the highlands has taken place, but woreda officials report that pastoralists who remained in the region have experienced from 40 to 70 percent livestock deaths due to starvation. Most pastoralists ignored warnings to destock during the early stages of the drought, with many preferring to try to hold out until the next rainy season starts in mid-July, due to low cattle prices and high transport costs for animal trucking. Children's nutritional status has declined somewhat, but the low level of severe acute malnutrition (0.3 percent) does not warrant a blanket under-five response. UNICEF and WFP continue their regular nutritional supplements program. USAID/OFDA is responding through IRC to improve water supply. END SUMMARY.

¶2. USAID Office Of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) regional advisors, water and sanitation technical advisor, and field officer, and USAID Ethiopia Asset And Livelihood Transitions (ALT) officer visited three affected Afar woredas June 27-30, meeting with regional and woreda officials, Save the Children-UK staff and a local NGO, Support to Sustainable Development, who briefed the USG team on prevailing conditions in Chifra, Uwa and Awra woredas. Also joining the assessment team was OFDA's Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) rapid response partner: the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) water and sanitation program officer.

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LACK OF RAINFALL CAUSE OF THE PROBLEM  
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¶3. Decreased rainfall earlier this year in northern Afar region has resulted in drought conditions in a number of woredas such as Chifra, Uwa, Awra and Telelek. Reports received from NGOs and the Afar Region Disaster Prevention and Preparedness and Food Security Bureau (DPFSB) highlighted unusual pastoralist migratory patterns due to lack of browse and pasture, deteriorating livestock conditions, high numbers of cattle deaths, plummeting livestock prices, and outbreaks of acute watery diarrhea (AWD) among woreda

residents.

¶4. Chifra authorities report that up to 40 percent of cattle in the woreda have died due to lack of pasture. There are two perennial rivers in the woreda, but water ponds have dried up. In the woreda, four of the five motorized boreholes are functional, while the available water in five hand pump-operated boreholes has reduced significantly. Weakened livestock must walk up to 35 kilometers to access water sources. AWD cases were reported as early as January, but the numbers appear to be declining.

¶5. Conditions in neighboring Uwa Woreda were similar to those observed in Chifra--no browse, pasture or forage for cattle and shoats--although the body conditions of goats and camels appeared somewhat better. Woreda officials reported large numbers of cattle and sheep deaths, abnormal pastoralist out-migration to the highlands, cases of AWD and several cases of malnutrition. Water sources in Uwa include one perennial river, two motorized boreholes, and three hand pump-operated boreholes, of which one was not operational. Five boreholes were drilled by the zonal water bureau two years ago, but were never finished. As with Chifra, residents are using perennial river water for both animal and human use.

¶6. Awra Woreda officials report scenarios more dire than Chifra and Uwa, claiming that up to 70 percent of cattle that did not migrate out of the woreda have died. The assessment team saw larger numbers of dead cattle while traveling through this woreda. Pastoralists were observed cutting down tops of trees to provide forage to emaciated cattle. Water sources in this woreda include one perennial river, three functioning motorized boreholes, one functioning hand pump-operated borehole, and a number of deep and shallow boreholes under construction by the regional water board. Officials also reported several water sources in need of

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rehabilitation and repair.

¶7. While the Afar Regional Water Bureau has provided two pickup trucks to transport water in jerry cans to the most seriously affected kebeles, woreda officials consider this far from adequate. They have requested water tankers from the Regional Water Bureau to distribute water to four of the most affected kebeles, but this request has not been processed. Cases of AWD were reported earlier this season, but few new cases are being reported now.

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GOVERNMENT AND UN RESPONSES  
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¶8. Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) wheat allocations for April and May have arrived in the woredas; distribution is scheduled for beneficiaries in the coming week. UNICEF Expanded Outreach Strategy (EOS) corn soy blend food for undernourished children has also been received and is also scheduled for distribution.

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IMPACT OF DROUGHT ON NUTRITIONAL STATUS  
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¶9. Reports that high numbers of children were malnourished due to milk and food shortages prompted a formal nutritional survey in late May 2007 by Save the Children-UK. The survey found global malnutrition rates (GAM) at 11.1 percent and severe malnutrition rates (SAM) at 0.3 percent.

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PREDICTIONS FOR 'KARMA' RAINY SEASON  
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¶10. The USAID-supported Famine Early Warning System predicts that the next rainy season for Afar Region, the 'karma' rains, will be normal to above-normal.

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EARLY WARNINGS DISREGARDED  
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¶11. COMMENT. While early warnings on drought conditions and impact on pastoralist livelihoods were communicated months ago, most pastoralists disregarded advice of NGOS, early warning agencies and local officials to destock herds of cattle and goats, fearing low livestock prices. A small number of herders sold stock and transported breeding stock early on to highland grazing areas either by truck or overland migration, but most declined this option, deciding instead to take a wait-and-see stance. It is this majority who are now dealing with the loss of their herds. Local officials confirmed that pastoralists were advised to destock, however, cultural beliefs that livestock numbers are a reflection of prestige and wealth inhibit aggressive destocking options for afar pastoralists.

¶12. COMMENT CONTINUED. The May 2007 nutritional survey results do not justify a robust response for children under five years of age at this time; however, USAID/OFDA is monitoring the food security situation closely and is in discussion with partner agencies which are responding with nutrition interventions. The karma rains are expected to commence by mid-July and should have a positive impact on pasture and water sources. In the meantime, the most critical concerns are to maintain current water sources, assist local water boards in repairing and completing non-functioning water sources, prevent additional cases of AWD, and provide PSNP and EOS food to vulnerable families. END COMMENT.

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USAID/OFDA RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS  
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¶13. USAID/OFDA supports IRC to provide rapid WASH responses to vulnerable communities. IRC will conduct a detailed assessment of areas where pastoralists have migrated, and areas where existing drinking water supply has significantly decreased. IRC will make

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recommendations for intervention in the region and coordinate response activities with USAID/OFDA, and regional and woreda officials. Preliminary observations suggest support to the Government of Ethiopia for chlorination programs targeting migrated pastoralists who use perennial river water for drinking, and repair of existing infrastructure in areas where water supply is declining.

¶14. USAID will continue to monitor the Afar drought situation, liaise with Afar Region stakeholders on best response options, and work with UN and operational agencies on contingency plans for drought response in the event the expected 'karma' rains fail to provide relief to vulnerable households and pastoralists in the affected woredas.

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